

GISWatch
10th anniversary

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH

*National and Regional Internet
Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)*



ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC)

Global Information Society Watch

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A special edition of GISWatch, "Internet governance from the edges: NRIs in their own words", is being published as a companion edition to the 2017 GISWatch annual report. It looks at the history, challenges and achievements of NRIs, as recounted by their organisers. It is available at <https://www.giswatch.org>

AUSTRALIA

DOING THE RIGHT THING



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Introduction

Before there was internet governance in Australia there were a handful of people, mostly blokes,¹ who would decide how certain types of information would be technically distributed, to whom it would be distributed, and where the means to decode and distribute that information existed.

Some of these people would come to be known as “wizards” while others were cantankerous volunteers to whom we would have to send our domain name applications. These people decided whether you were an authentic applicant or not, whether you had the right stuff to be privileged with a domain name that ended with the letters “a” and “u”. These were the days when web addresses splashed on the side of a bus were still a novelty and hashtags were entirely unheard of outside Internet Relay Chat.²

By the mid-1990s, the wizards were tiring of the thousands of domain name applications they and their volunteer teams had to process. There were few if any means to dispute their decisions. While by this stage policies and procedures had evolved, they had done so among an international fraternity that knew and trusted each other. This was about to change, and when it did, working out how to govern the internet was to become a serious and necessary undertaking everywhere.

In Australia, doing the right thing meant the wizards relinquishing trust to authorised bodies.

This is their story: how they and the new institutions that replaced them influenced internet governance both nationally and regionally, and what we can look forward to.³

Background

It was being taught how to prepare a Spanish omelette in a Melbourne kitchen that drew me to the work of community internet activist and writer, the late Chris Nicol. As he shared stories from his beloved Barcelona, we drifted towards his writing on information and communications technology (ICT) policy and how to inspire communities to engage with it. His view was that ICT policy matters to everyone, that the means to understand it and how to engage with it ought be a collective effort, from all manner of civil society actors. Their involvement would stimulate policy debates that are as accessible as they are meaningful:

Getting involved in [ICT] policy-making has not been a priority for most people, even those who are generally active in other areas of public policy. It often seems removed from our daily experience, and technically complicated. Yet new communications media are becoming so important that we cannot continue to ignore them.⁴

Getting involved in internet governance is just what individuals and small teams from Australia have done since the early pioneering days of the internet. They have been doing what one of Australia’s internet pioneers and active internet governance forum participant Paul Wilson⁵ describes as bringing a “modern agenda” to the sector, along with sound knowledge and strong negotiating skills, a case of “doing the right thing” at many levels.⁶ But doing the right thing within international arenas does not always translate into national policy, as we shall discover. Doing the right thing also meant that the wizards who developed Australia’s internet infrastructure, the AARNET, had to be brought into a more institutional-like setting.⁷

1 Blokes is an Australian colloquialism for men.

2 Also known as IRC. The “#” was used to categorise interests into groups. Now referred to as the hash symbol, it was originally known as the “pound” sign.

3 This report is based on my own experience as an internet activist, and on the answers to questions I posed to several stakeholders while writing.

4 Nicol, C. (Ed.) (2003). *ICT Policy: A Beginner’s Handbook*. Association for Progressive Communications. https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/policy_handbook_EN.pdf

5 Paul Wilson was a co-founder of Pegasus Networks, establishing its technical services and leading the development of numerous innovations in community computer communications in Australia and Southeast Asia and with partner networks throughout the then-emerging Association for Progressive Communications.

6 Email interview with Paul Wilson, director general, Asia Pacific Network Information Centre, July 2017.

7 Williams, L. (2003). Internet Governance in Australia: Modelling Self-Regulatory Structures in the Domain Name System. (3), 1-13.

Australia has held five national Internet Governance Forums (IGFs) since 2012. Stakeholders from technical communities and civil society have participated in the global IGF since it was founded in 2008. Its own internet governance practice can be traced back to the management of the letters “a” and “u”. As the new regulatory arrangements for the management of the internet internationally were still evolving, individuals such as Robert Elz were known to wield significant influence over these matters. Elz held administrative responsibility for the letters “a” and “u” since 1985, and delegating their use was often characterised as *ad hoc* or on a “rough consensus” basis, processes little understood by anyone outside the technical communities that controlled these resources.⁸

Among other achievements, Elz, one of Australia’s original wizards of the internet, provided the delegation of domain names for free. In fact, all of the wizards pioneering the internet and the policies that were to govern its early days in this country were not interested in commercial outcomes. This was possible when the number of web pages in Australia could still be counted by the few services who hosted them. I can still recall a time when it was possible to visit every web page that had until then been published.⁹ But by the mid-1990s, with businesses increasingly seeking an online presence, Elz found the task of handling the rapid increase in domain name requests no longer manageable. As such he licensed the management of the letters “a” and “u” to Melbourne IT,¹⁰ a commercial enterprise originally founded by Melbourne University. Both parties agreed on a five-year licence, during which time Melbourne IT commercialised the .au name space which eventually led to the creation of a single regulatory body that would ultimately be responsible for it.

In October 2001 the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) transferred all responsibility for the management of the .au domain space from Elz to the industry policy and regulatory authority, .au Domain Administration Ltd (auDA).¹¹ This was the end of the internet organised, governed and loosely regulated by a patchwork of individuals relying on

their historical associations and technical know-how. A new generation of wizards and wizardesses were mobilising, and they knew inclusivity would be an invaluable ingredient in a fully functional, well-governed internet. Australia was not short of such people, but they would have their challenges.

Doing the right thing: An Australian IGF

In 2012 the auDA hosted the first Australian Internet Governance Forum (auIGF). It did so in an increasingly divisive, punitive and intolerant political climate in Australia. So much so that the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has slammed Australia’s regressive stance on both first nations peoples and asylum seekers.¹²

Similarly, the former Australian Human Rights Commissioner Gillian Triggs has described the Australian government as being “ideologically opposed to human rights.” Human rights, she says, are “regressing on almost every front.”¹³

It was in such a climate of despair for the civil liberties hard won decades prior and deserted by a slew of career politicians drawn from the ranks of big business and a minority of powerful conservatives that the auIGF forged ahead. It did so with a progressive programme that would contribute to Australia’s regional and international participation in internet governance matters. What it did there could be characterised by a willingness for transparency and inclusivity, carrying on from the work of former delegations.

From 2012 to 2016 the auIGF was steeped in a broad multistakeholder perspective. University researchers, non-government agencies, ICT regulatory bodies, the regional internet address registry APNIC,¹⁴ the Internet Society (ISOC),¹⁵ internet service providers (ISPs), educators and health professionals, open platform advocates, journalists, politicians and UN delegates filled the two-day annual events. With auDA at the helm, possibly surprising Elz and his maturing wizards, many libertarian voices were given a respectful platform for their views and urgent appeals for better regulation and policy. In particular, representation at the first IGF in 2012 by one of a new breed of internet wizards, former Senator Scott Ludlam, an opponent of Australia’s data retention laws, who has called for

8 Ibid.

9 In 1992, there were 10 web pages on the internet. By 1993, another 120 had appeared, one of them a crude but effective site for Pegasus Networks, and by 1994, my first creative site, the spoken word opera *Black Harlequin*. This consisted of a gallery of digital art and libretto. It was one of the 2,738 sites now on the internet, many of which included websites by other Australians rapidly gaining skills in hypertext mark-up language (HTML), including Max Hawk from Electric Tipi and Glasswings.

10 Melbourne IT is a domain name registrar founded in 1996. <https://www.melbourneit.com.au>

11 Lim, J. (2001, 3 September). .au Delegated to auDA. auDA. <https://www.auda.org.au/news/au-delegated-to-auda>

12 Butler, J. (2017, 25 July). All The Times The UN Has Slammed Australia’s Asylum Seeker Policy. *Huffington Post Australia*. https://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/2017/07/25/all-the-times-the-un-has-slammed-australias-asylum-seeker-polic_a_23046469

13 Slezak, M. (2017, 26 July). Gillian Triggs: Australian government ‘ideologically opposed to human rights’. *The Guardian*. <https://goo.gl/41bAUu>

14 <https://www.apnic.net>

15 <https://www.internetsociety.org>

the establishment of an eSafety Commissioner and for such expertise to be placed within the Human Rights Commission to protect Australians online:

People are living more and more of their daily lives online, and I think we should all be able to assume that that is a safe place to congregate as much as a town square should be a safe place to congregate. The government, therefore, should be looking for more ways to uphold and increase protection of people's rights and safety as we migrate online.¹⁶

A leading voice in internet regulatory circles, former Senator Kate Lundy, was an advocate for open government and citizen-centric data or “accessible and transparent data, the extent government engages with citizens in decision making and accessibility of government itself.”¹⁷

Both Ludlam and Lundy opened the first aulGF in October of 2012, which discussed issues around the security and protection of Australia's critical infrastructure, “the economic activity it underpins, and the most vulnerable individual users in our community.”¹⁸

Both themes continued to be explored in forthcoming aulGFs, with an increasing emphasis on the protection of minorities; online harassment and the lack of women in technical industries; and indigenous communities and how the internet may facilitate social, economic and cultural development within them.¹⁹

How seriously concerns regarding the robustness and security of Australia's information infrastructure were taken is questionable – 2016 will be remembered as the year Australians crashed the Australian Taxation Office website simply by lodging their tax returns.²⁰ Barely six months into 2017, Australians endured an escalation in critical infrastructure data breaches, the most significant being the discovery that Australian health records were being sold on the dark web.²¹ The same vendor had also offered up logins to numerous Australian ISPs and sold business credit cards. One happy buyer of “Aussie Business Credit Cards” boasted of their “great quality”. All this after the introduction of the Privacy Amendment (Notifiable

Data Breaches) Act of 2017²² which, as described by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner, requires organisations governed by the Australian Privacy Act 1988 to notify any individuals likely to be at risk of serious harm by a data breach.²³ It is unlikely any did. As at the time of writing, Federal Police investigations are still underway.

By 2014 the aulGF was in full swing. The forum opened with a panel session titled “Who ‘governs the Internet’ and what is its future?” It did so as a response to the multistakeholder framework that had been evolving around the management of the internet, particularly in light of the United States (US) government's withdrawal from its oversight of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN).

The then Australian Communications Minister Malcolm Turnbull declared in his blog that the “Australian Government is absolutely committed to supporting an open Internet which is administered by multi-stakeholder organisations like ICANN and NOT by governments whether in the form of consortia or multilateral organisations like the ITU or the UN.”²⁴ He went on to say that the Australian government was committed “to a multi-stakeholder system of governance,” and would “work with the Australian and global Internet community including other governments to ensure that the Internet remains free, stable and resilient and continues to be a powerful platform for freedom around the world.”²⁵

Spurred on by Turnbull's essay, panellists would discuss concerns and opportunities presented by an internet governed by stakeholders from all sectors, improving on all levels of engagement, legitimacy, transparency and accountability.²⁶

At the 2015 aulGF Senator Terri Buttler advocated for the participation in online spaces for “people of all genders” and in doing so gave notice of a private members bill²⁷ to criminalise so-called “revenge porn”:

The internet, like other forms and means of human interaction, is susceptible to gendered abuse. It's

16 Ludlam, S. (2017, 19 June). Making the internet safe for everyone. *GreensMPs*. <https://scott-ludlam.greensmps.org.au/articles/making-internet-safe-everyone>

17 Senator Kate Lundy on Open Government and Citizen-centric Services. <https://goo.gl/Tciikv>

18 AulGF 2012 event schedule.

19 Hollins, H. (2015, 18 May). The internet and its influence on Australian Society. *auDA*. <https://www.auda.org.au/news/the-internet-and-its-influence-on-australian-society/#top>

20 Towell, N. (2016, 16 December). Australian Tax Office website crash: ATO promises answers for tech wreck. *The Canberra Times*. <https://goo.gl/befphV>

21 Elton-Pym, J. (2017, 7 June). Medicare data breach is the tip of the iceberg in the world of Australian dark web fraud. *SBS News*. <https://goo.gl/tESgFR>

22 Privacy Amendment (Notifiable Data Breaches) Act 2017, Federal Register of Legislation. <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2017A00012>

23 Notifiable Data Breaches, Office of the Australian Information Commissioner. <https://www.oaic.gov.au/engage-with-us/consultations/notifiable-data-breaches>

24 Turnbull, M. (2014, 8 March). Launch of Strategy and Statecraft in Cyberspace research program. <https://goo.gl/MzkNGq>

25 Turnbull, M. (2014, 15 March). Australia is committed to a multi-stakeholder system of Internet governance. <https://goo.gl/aw2r55>

26 AulGF 2014 event schedule.

27 A private bill is a proposal for a law that would apply to a particular individual or group of individuals, or corporate entity. This is unlike public bills which apply to everyone within their jurisdiction. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Private_bill

also a great way of distributing information broadly and quickly. This does not make the internet inherently good or inherently bad. But it does give rise to new opportunities, and new challenges. One challenge is the rise of “revenge porn”, which seems gendered, though there’s not yet much empirical evidence about it.²⁸

The New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria state governments have now each introduced legislation that will see tougher criminal and civil penalties imposed on people who share or post sexually explicit photos of others without their consent.²⁹

In spite of five successful auGFs – auGFs that took up the complex issues of governing the ungovernable, such as the 2015 workshop “Does the digital world license us to behave differently?” – 2016’s auGF was the last that auDA would host.

After an internal shake-up that saw changes in the executive management of the auDA, it conducted a review of its community activities, which subsequently saw it withdraw its involvement in hosting any further auGFs. In doing so, it also withdrew from having successfully bid to host the first regional IGF in Australia. In the ensuing chaos, Thailand succeeded in hosting the 2017 Asia regional IGF in a rebidding process.

It seems to be an odd decision, given that the 2016 auGF was a forum in which auDA’s new executive management declared a renewed focus on stakeholder engagement – with terms such as “renewed processes” and “innovative thinking” uttered to an audience of internet professionals – particularly in the area of building international partnerships and cybersecurity.³⁰

It would take researching this report for those of us engaged in local and regional internet governance issues to discover that the auDA had removed all information archived on auGF websites, including papers presented, reports tabled and proposals for international and regional participation drafted. The only materials remaining are auGF programmes found on the auDA blog and the Wayback Machine.³¹ At the time of writing, it remains unclear as to why the auGF document record was removed.

Regional reflection

In 2011, I stepped up to immigration at Soekarno-Hatta International Airport, having just arrived in Indonesia. The officer took my passport and had me stare into a

device. I thought a photo was about to be taken, but then I recognised it as an iris scanning identification technology. I said, “We don’t have such tech in Australia.” He replied, “You should. We got it from you.”

While a small number of Australians shared our expertise across Southeast Asia through forums and workshops, helping to define what it means to have rights online and to secure them, the Australian government has been active in its support for, and – according to Edward Snowden’s revelations³² – active participation in surveillance of the region’s citizenry. It is also host to controversial US signals collection facilities in Pine Gap, Northern Territory and the Cocos Islands, a satellite intercept facility in Kojarena, Western Australia, and another in Shoal Bay, Northern Territory.

Whatever work gets done at regional or sub-regional IGF initiatives is entirely reliant on individuals, their skills and capacity for working across multistakeholder agendas. But it must be remembered that no matter what is done, no matter what is celebrated, no matter the influence one perceives possible, there are the all too pervasive activities of surveillance by states, monitoring, data collecting and matching. With such powerful interests at play, how can we know whether work within these spaces amounts to anything tangible in terms of positive outcomes for the region’s citizenry? What is an inclusive, transparent internet governance framework if it is wilfully undermined by countries such as Australia and its allies?

Conclusions

Australians are well known for their slogans. “No worries”, “she’ll be right” and “fair go” are among the most popular. In former times they spoke of a relaxed attitude to life-ensuring rights for all that included health care, free education, workers’ rights and minimum pay. But they are hollow terms now, as hollow as the slogans cooked up by politicians and their advisors. “Innovation Nation” is one of the latest. It is so hollow you can hear the white noise between each syllable.

At the time of writing, Turnbull is now prime minister. The libertarian ideals he boasted about in 2014 are all but forgotten in 2017. With “national security” and “border control” as its catch-cries, it is not hard to imagine the Australian government heading towards authoritarianism. A cantankerous approach to national security has seen over 60 new pieces of legislation introduced, with “anti-terror”

28 Butler, T. (2015). Speech to the Australian Internet Governance Forum.

29 Doran, M. (2017, 20 May). Revenge porn legislation a step closer as Government considers criminal, civil penalties. *ABC News*. <https://goo.gl/po5Mc9>

30 Reid, K. (2016, 17 October). Australian Internet Governance Forum 2016. *Klog: Kathy Reid’s Blog*. <https://goo.gl/z4OhqP>

31 A digital archive of web pages. <https://waybackmachine.org>

32 Keane, B. (2015, 5 June). What Snowden has so far revealed about Australia’s surveillance culture. *Crikey*. <https://www.crikey.com.au/2015/06/05/what-snowden-has-so-far-revealed-about-australias-surveillance-culture>

laws added to the Commonwealth Criminal Code Act including ancillary laws that protect from public scrutiny any processes involving terrorism charges.³³ This includes a series of controversial measures impacting on ICTs and ICT users in Australia. The mandatory data retention scheme came into effect in April 2017,³⁴ providing law enforcement and security agencies with the legal means to compel all Australian internet service providers to retain private data. There are also calls for companies hosting encrypted communications to provide Australian security services with open access to them. In instructing Australians and Australian businesses on the ethics of encryption, Turnbull has again stepped up to the podium, declaring that “the laws of mathematics are very commendable but the only laws that apply in Australia is the law of Australia.”³⁵

Australians deserve a forum for critical debate and policy interventions on ICT matters urgently. The much lauded government-initiated and funded National Broadband Network (NBN) is built upon an ailing copper-fed infrastructure. The NBN continues to cripple capacity for high-quality internet services with speeds being reported as less than what had been available through existing internet service providers. Australians are spending more on internet and mobile telephony in spite of costs dropping in other countries. Australians are also being serviced by insecure web platforms for government entitlements, including social and welfare departments implementing a scandalous automated debt-recovery application³⁶ serving their clients with inaccurate claims of overpayment.

How can Australia even hope to influence a free and inclusive internet, as described by Turnbull in 2014, when it appears unable to make reparations for its own past? Provisions for an Aboriginal

consultative body to the federal government proposed by the National Council of Elders at the 2017 First Nations National Constitutional Convention³⁷ have been, by and large, rejected. This is also a government that praises inequality as aspirational, its treasurer claiming that inequality in Australia is not getting worse, but better. This claim is generally understood to mean that so long as there is inequality – unemployment, unaffordable housing and education, impoverished living standards and high rates of indigenous incarceration, for example – there is aspiration.³⁸

As I was completing this overview I sent out one more round of questions, seeking at the very least a copy of the papers that had been deleted from the aulGF website. Paul Wilson replied with news of a new initiative, the founding of the Australian Internet Community Forum,³⁹ hewn from the remains of the aulGF. The proposal, developed in part by a community of Australian internet stakeholders, proposes:

- To map the landscape and provide a “state of play” on current internet governance issues and activities in Australia, in the Asia-Pacific region, and in the wider global context.
- To facilitate provision of stakeholder input to Australian government policy positions in relation to internet governance issues.
- To consider ways in which Australia’s role and participation in internet governance activities within the Asia-Pacific region might potentially be strengthened and enhanced.
- To consider options for the establishment of an ongoing, sustainable platform for the Australian internet community to engage in discussion and consultation on internet governance issues.

Led in part by the consultancy firm Australian Continuous Improvement Group (ACIG),⁴⁰ the proposed Australian Internet Community Forum will be comprised of a steering committee drawn from the Australian government, APNIC, the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN),⁴¹ ACIG and Electronic Frontiers Australia (EFA). By

33 Barnes, G. (2015, 13 October). Welcome to authoritarian Australia, where more anti-terror laws won’t keep us safe. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/13/welcome-to-authoritarian-australia-where-more-anti-terror-laws-wont-keep-us-safe>

34 The Australian Telecommunications (Interception and Access) Act 1979 requires telecommunications companies to retain a particular set of telecommunications data for at least two years. These obligations ensure Australia’s law enforcement and security agencies are lawfully able to access data, subject to strict controls. <https://www.ag.gov.au/dataretention>

35 Kostarelis, S. (2107, 17 July). Turnbull says Australian law beats math, calls for open access to encrypted messages. *Techly*. <https://www.techly.com.au/2017/07/17/turnbull-laws-beats-math-access-encrypted-messages>

36 Towell, N. (2017, 22 June). Parliamentary committee finds Centrelink robo-debt system has had ‘profoundly negative impact’. *Sydney Morning Herald*. www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/robodebt-has-harmed-thousands-say-senators-20170621-gwvzgzg.html

37 <https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/event/first-nations-regional-dialogue-in-urulu>

38 Chan, G. (2017, 24 July). Scott Morrison claims inequality in Australia is not getting worse, but better. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/jul/24/scott-morrison-claims-inequality-in-australia-is-not-getting-worse-but-better>

39 Activities proposed by stakeholders engaged in developing the Australian Internet Community Forum (AICF). The AICF replaces the discontinued aulGF.

40 acig.com.au

41 <https://accan.org.au>

the time this report is published, the Australian Internet Community Forum will have had its first meeting in November 2017. One of its aims is to provide a meaningful platform which will inform its representation to the global IGF in Geneva on 18-21 December.

If Australia has anything it hopes to share, stimulate, encourage and stand for at regional and international IGFs, it has much to do at home. Hard-working Australian delegates are doing incredible work on a regional and international level, but they do so returning to a country that appears to hinder their efforts locally. Perhaps the internet we share stories by in the future – a pluralist, secure, culturally and intellectually diverse internet – will inform, guide and motivate decision makers and the public alike to *do the right thing*, uplifting Australia to the land of the fair go it had once aspired to be.

Action steps

Internet policy debates are not for everyone, but the policies themselves affect us all. What can be done, I hear you ask? As much or as little as you are prepared to do. Some of these “action steps” may be of interest, or the reading list that follows may be more to your liking.

National strategies

If you care about reliable, affordable and state-of-the-art internet access in Australia, look for the organisations that are lobbying on your behalf and support their efforts. Some of these organisations include:

- Digital Rights Watch Australia
digitalrightswatch.org.au
- Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN)
<https://accan.org.au>
- CHOICE
<https://www.choice.com.au/electronics-and-technology>
- Australian Digital Alliance
<https://digital.org.au>
- Electronic Frontiers Australia (EFA)
<https://www.efa.org.au/get-involved>
- Internet Australia
<https://www.internet.org.au>

Get involved in the new Australian Internet Community Forum and encourage local community groups to do so too. This is about every one of us, not just technologists and policy advocates.

Local strategies

Talk about these issues within your local communities. If you're not happy with the high cost of internet access and the poor service being provided, it's likely your neighbours are not happy either. Host a dinner, invite your neighbours, and discuss these issues with a view to creating a coordinated strategy to improve access in your area.

Inform your gatherings with information sourced from any of the groups listed above. Other sources of sound information include:

- Association for Progressive Communications
<https://www.apc.org>
- Access Now
<https://www.accessnow.org>

Write up your collective concerns and talk to journalists who may be interested in your story. Publications that would be interested to hear from you include:

- The Saturday Paper
<https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au>
- Crikey
<https://www.crikey.com.au>
- New Matilda
<https://newmatilda.com>
- The Guardian Australia
<https://www.theguardian.com/au>

For more recommendations on how to plan, inform and activate your campaign check out the following resources:

- CommunityRun by GetUp
<https://www.communityrun.org>
- Our Community
<https://www.ourcommunity.com.au/>

All up, may I be so bold as to suggest that it is up to each and every one of us to make our home on planet Earth safe and nourishing for all flora and fauna alike. How and with whom we access and share information about such matters, and everything in between, matters.

Reading list

Free Speech – Ten Principles for a Connected World, Timothy Garton-Ash, Atlantic Books, 2016.

Out of the Wreckage: A New Politics for an Age of Crisis, George Monbiot, Verso, 2017.

ICT Policy: A Beginner's Handbook, edited by Chris Nicol, Association for Progressive Communications, 2003.

National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)

National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs) are now widely recognised as a vital element of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) process. In fact, they are seen to be the key to the sustainability and ongoing evolution of collaborative, inclusive and multistakeholder approaches to internet policy development and implementation.

A total of 54 reports on NRIs are gathered in this year's Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch). These include 40 country reports from contexts as diverse as the United States, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea and Colombia.

The country reports are rich in approach and style and highlight several challenges faced by activists organising and participating in national IGFs, including broadening stakeholder participation, capacity building, the unsettled role of governments, and impact.

Seven regional reports analyse the impact of regional IGFs, their evolution and challenges, and the risks they still need to take to shift governance to the next level, while seven thematic reports offer critical perspectives on NRIs as well as mapping initiatives globally.

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